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Report of the Secretary-General on developments in Guinea-Bissau and on the activities of the United Nations Peacebuilding Support Office in that country

I. Introduction

1. The present report is submitted pursuant to paragraph 14 of Security Council resolution 1233 (1999), by which the Council requested me to keep it regularly informed and to submit a report on developments in Guinea-Bissau and on the activities of the United Nations Peacebuilding Support Office in that country (UNOGBIS). Subsequently, in paragraph 11 of Security Council resolution 1580 (2004), the Council requested me to submit a written report to it every three months.

2. The present report focuses on developments since my previous report, dated 28 September 2007 (S/2007/576).

II. Political developments

3. The demands for the replacement of the Minister of the Interior and the Minister for Finance by appointees from the Social Renewal Party (PRS) dominated political attention for much of the period under review. The period was also marked by rising social tensions, which coincided with a long parliamentary recess. There was an increasing feeling of social malaise and reinforced perceptions that State institutions were adrift. Despite a well-orchestrated campaign by his supporters, Baciro Dabó was dismissed as Minister of the Interior by presidential decree on 16 October. He was replaced by a member of PRS, Certório Biote, thus resolving the last major outstanding issue that had hampered the effective implementation of the political stability pact signed in April by the country's three main political parties represented in the National Assembly — the African Party for the Independence of Guinea and Cape Verde (PAIGC), PRS and the United Social Democratic Party (PUSD). The dismissal was preceded by reports of growing tensions between the Minister and the Chief of Staff of the armed forces, amid allegations of military support for the PRS position. The reports were denied by a military spokesman on 16 October and by the Chief of Staff himself.

4. The decision of the President reinforced widespread unease over what was perceived as military pressure and interference in politics. Since September, civil

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society organizations had, on various occasions, voiced concerns to my Representative over growing military protagonism in the political arena, especially after the usual practice of assigning police to protect members of the Government was changed and the police guards of the Prime Minister were replaced by military guards on 14 September. The human rights non-governmental organization Liga Guineense dos Direitos Humanos wrote to my Representative on 30 October, drawing attention to concerns of Mr. Dabó's family over alleged threats to his life. Liga Guineense dos Direitos Humanos also warned of threats to democracy posed by "constant interventions of hidden forces", which it said were subverting constitutional norms and practices in the country. The new Minister of the Interior subsequently met the President of Liga Guineense dos Direitos Humanos and assured him of the safety of Mr. Dabó.

5. Meanwhile, the first ordinary session of the 2007/8 parliamentary year commenced on 19 November 2007, and is scheduled to end on 19 December 2007. The draft agenda includes consideration of the Government programme and budget, as well as an amnesty bill for those who were involved in military interventions from November 1980 to 6 October 2004. In his opening speech, President Vieira reiterated his call for the holding of local government elections, saying that democracy in Guinea-Bissau would not be complete without them. He also urged the National Assembly to give priority to the debate on amnesty. The Speaker, Francisco Benante, stressed that an amnesty law should not violate international law and should take into consideration the recommendations in Security Council resolution 1580 (2004), in which the Council called upon the Government and national authorities to consider the issues of justice and impunity when addressing the issue of granting amnesty. He also warned that any future element or group seeking to subvert constitutional order through force would not be granted amnesty, and recommended that the institutions of the State resort to subregional and other international assistance if the country's forces were unable to respect constitutional order. On 28 November, Parliament unanimously approved the State budget for 2007, with 81 votes in favour. This followed the approval by Parliament of the Government programme on 23 November.

6. The Government and the three parties signatory to the stability pact — PAIGC, PRS and PUSD — held several meetings before the start of the parliamentary session to harmonize positions and to iron out differences that might jeopardize the survival of the Government. In that regard, the Government and parliamentarians of the signatory parties met on 1 and 2 November to discuss issues related to political and government stability. The party leaders stressed that long-lasting solutions to the problems facing Guinea-Bissau could be achieved only through consensus.

7. In response to a request by the Government of Guinea-Bissau for United Nations assistance in organizing the legislative elections scheduled for 2008, a United Nations electoral assistance mission was dispatched to Bissau from 26 September to 4 October to carry out a needs assessment. The mission recommended a positive response to the request and to the setting up of a United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) electoral support project for the country. The recommendations also included updating the proposed electoral budget and calendar in line with existing legislation, developing national capacity for planning electoral operations, creating a donor coordination mechanism and providing support for the National Electoral Commission civic and voter education campaigns. A UNDP technical mission subsequently visited Bissau from 5 to 13 October to

draw up a project document for electoral assistance. The main difficulties in finalizing the technical details are related to the consolidation and harmonization of the budgets of the various entities involved in the organization of the elections, and arriving at a political consensus on the date of the election and voter registration.

8. The Estados Gerais dialogue initiative, with financial support from UNOGBIS, organized a total of 15 meetings during October and November in the capital, centre, north and south of the country. The meetings were attended by citizens from a wide spectrum of society to identify the main causes of instability and find national solutions to critical issues. The Estados Gerais steering committee is also planning to convene a national meeting of traditional leaders by the end of this year. That meeting will serve to broaden the level of national participation in this all-inclusive dialogue initiative and to help galvanize the widest possible interest in the process.

9. The participative dialogue programme led by the National Institute for Studies and Research and Interpeace — Voz di Paz/Voice of Peace — continued to consolidate its 12 regional platforms for dialogue in all the regions of the country, through needs assessments and participatory planning. The dialogue platforms are rooted in existing economic associations, non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and community radios, and are open to assisting other conflict resolution initiatives. An intense phase of participative research on the root causes of conflict, based on grass-roots consultations in 38 constituencies, will start towards the end of 2007.

10. Under the capacity-building programme for Parliament funded by the United Nations Democracy Fund and coordinated by UNDP, the Netherlands Development Organization and UNOGBIS organized training sessions for 11 parliamentarians, including four women, and one permanent staff of the National Assembly, in conflict transformation skills from 25 to 28 September and for 15 parliamentarians, including four women, in leadership skills from 12 to 16 November. A subregional conference was hosted by the National Assembly on 25 and 26 October for women parliamentarians and civil society leaders from Guinea, Guinea-Bissau and Senegal on the consequences of conflict in the border areas with Senegal. The conference was attended by 45 women from the national assemblies and NGOs from those countries. The conference was funded under the United Nations Democracy Fund programme and organized with technical assistance of the Netherlands Development Organization and UNOGBIS.

III. Economic and social aspects

11. During the period under review, the economic and social situation in Guinea-Bissau remained stable but fragile. On 17 September, the Executive Board of the International Monetary Fund (IMF) concluded article IV consultations with Guinea-Bissau. The Board welcomed the Government's emergency fiscal programme as a promising start to restoring fiscal stability and transparency, and encouraged the authorities to reach an early agreement on emergency post-conflict assistance. The Board observed that Guinea-Bissau was severely debt-distressed and would remain reliant on the support of donors over the medium term in order to reduce its outstanding domestic debt burden and to achieve its economic and social objectives. The Board recommended that any new financial assistance should be on highly concessional terms, preferably grants, so as not to add to the debt burden. A mission

from IMF visited Bissau from 6 to 19 November within the framework of emergency post-conflict assistance. The mission noted improved fiscal performance in relation to the first half of the year and also observed that information and data flows had improved. However, it stressed that there was still much work to be done. The mission announced that in the light of positive developments, IMF would be in a position to enter into an agreement on emergency post-conflict assistance from January to December 2008. Consequently, $5.6 million would be available under emergency post-conflict assistance and disbursed in two six-month tranches. However, the mission indicated that the financing gap for 2008 remained significant and, based on current estimates, stood at approximately 24 billion CFA francs (approximately €36 million). The head of the IMF mission stressed that Guinea-Bissau would continue to need substantial assistance from the international community. She also expressed confidence that the fiscal programme of the Government presented positive prospects and that its economic team had the competence and capacity to implement emergency post-conflict assistance.

12. A World Bank mission also visited Bissau from 16 to 23 November to hold discussions on the state of public finances with the Government and the IMF team and to boost cooperation efforts, including preparations for a social emergency programme. The World Bank will be providing $6 million, to be disbursed in January and February 2008, to assist in clearing salary arrears and $10 million for budgetary support. The Government is on schedule in its debt repayments to the African Development Bank, following the scheduled repayment of $88,147 due in October.

13. Social tensions are mounting over unpaid salary arrears and rising prices of basic food items. While the Government is up to date with civil service salaries for the period April to October 2007, it has not paid the salary arrears for February and March, which it inherited from the previous Government. However, Minister for Finance Issufo Sanhá indicated that the arrears would be cleared by December. There was a rice shortage that caused retail prices to go up by some 35 per cent. Given the high rate of absolute poverty in the country, such shortages and price hikes have significant social and economic impacts. The Government, trade unions and economic operators met within the framework of the permanent social arbitration council (Conselho Permanente para a Concertação Social) in November to find ways of reducing the impact of the price increases. At the same time, there has been a wave of strikes by teachers and health workers since November over the non-payment of salary arrears and other contractual issues. The General Confederation of Independent Trade Unions warned the Government on 29 October that its grace period was over, while the National Union of Guinean Workers advocated dialogue. Talks between the teachers and health workers unions and the Government, under the aegis of the Permanent Social Arbitration Council in mid-November, were inconclusive, and the unions served notice of further strike action. The General Confederation of Independent Trade Unions also warned that Government proposals on promotions in the armed forces were unaffordable and would not be tolerated, especially since the civil service had not received pay increases for several years.

14. The production of rice and other cereals was affected by late and inadequate rains. According to a joint mission in October by the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations and the Permanent Inter-State Committee for Drought Control in the Sahel, the 2007/8 cereal crop yields were 9 per cent below

the 2006/7 yields. It concluded that there would be a substantial cereal deficit and that the country would have to import over 85,000 tons of cereal, the equivalent of one third of overall cereal consumption.

15. In early October, an outbreak of cholera was identified in the southern region of Tombali; 109 cases and three deaths were reported by 8 November. The epidemic has been limited so far to villages along the southern coast, in part due to the rapid response of the Government and local authorities, with the support of the United Nations. Meanwhile, the national health sector development plan for the period 2008-2012 is nearing completion. It outlines strategies and priorities in line with the country's poverty reduction strategy plan. In October, the Government adopted a national plan to combat HIV/AIDS. The prevention of mother-to-child HIV/AIDS transmission remains a concern, as there is no funding for the only actor in the field, the NGO Céu na Terra, to continue its activities. The United Nations is assisting the Government to establish a new national plan in this area and is providing training to staff at national health centres so that they may incorporate these services in health centres.

16. The United Nations Population Fund and UNDP are supporting the Government to conduct a population census. The last census was carried out in 1991. The door-to-door census is scheduled to take place in March 2008, but $2 million is required to finalize the operation.

17. Prime Minister Cabi has reiterated to my Representative the Government's request for Guinea-Bissau to be included on the agenda of the Peacebuilding Commission and to receive assistance from the Peacebuilding Fund, stressing that those measures are crucial for socio-economic revitalization and strengthening of political stability in the country. On 16 November, the Prime Minister emphasized to my Representative that the Government had demonstrated its political will to combat drug trafficking through its emergency plan of action and that, if placed on the agenda of the Peacebuilding Commission, Guinea-Bissau would focus on quick impact projects in public health, education and the provision of other basic services. The Government, he added, would also undertake medium to long-term support for economic governance and security sector reform and carry out resource mobilization through concerted efforts to implement sustainable post-conflict reconstruction and peacebuilding.

IV. Military and security aspects

18. Under its programme of assistance for security sector reform, UNDP has agreed to finance an independent census of active personnel in the armed forces. A reliable census is seen as essential for planning and attracting donor support for security sector reform, as decisions on the needs and numbers of the members of the armed forces to be targeted for demobilization cannot be taken without census data. The terms of reference for the conduct of the census have been drafted in consultation with the national authorities and key partners. Work on the census is planned to start in January 2008. A joint advisory mission of the European Council and European Commission visited Bissau from 8 to 12 October to conduct a needs assessment to support the security sector reform within the framework of the European Security and Defence Policy. The European Commission representative announced that the European Commission had earmarked €8 million for security

sector reform for the period 2008-2013. The European Commission is sending four military specialists to work with Guinea-Bissau's Security Sector Reform Technical Coordinating Committee.

19. On 12 November, my Representative convened a meeting of the international partners group in Bissau, to review the final draft of an anti-narcotics programme document, including a costing plan. The costing plan covered the national emergency plan of action against drug trafficking, unveiled by the Government in August as part of the overall security sector reform programme. This costing plan will be part of the working documents for the Lisbon international conference on drug trafficking in Guinea-Bissau, which is being organized by the Governments of Guinea-Bissau and Portugal, to be held on 19 December 2007. The costing plan, which was developed by the Government with technical support from the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime, is built around three clusters: investigative and enforcing capacities; judicial prosecution and the administration of justice; and execution of sentences and prison reform. The anti-narcotics programme, costed at $19.1 million with $301,900 already available, will be implemented in complementary phases: a quick impact phase in 2008, and a stabilization and security sector reform integration phase from 2009 to 2010. It also provides for enhanced physical protection of state officials most likely to be exposed to threats or reprisals by drug traffickers. The Lisbon conference and the response of the international community will be essential if the Government's stated commitment to combating transnational organized criminal networks in Guinea-Bissau is to succeed. In addition to the four technical missions it fielded in October, the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime posted a senior anti-organized-crime consultant and a senior legal assistance regional adviser to Bissau in November. They will be replaced in the near future by two officers of the Office to be recruited through projects to be financed by UNDP. The Executive Director of the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime, Antonio Maria Costa, visited Guinea-Bissau on 27 November for discussions with national authorities and partners regarding the efforts to combat drug trafficking and organized crime. In addition to hosting and organizing the Lisbon conference, the Government of Portugal posted experts in Bissau on a temporary basis to provide legal, investigative and penitentiary administration advice to the Ministry of Justice and Judicial Police.

20. UNOGBIS held a workshop on 23 and 25 October on peacekeeping operations for 27 officers of the armed forces, within the context of preparations for a unit to join the standby peacekeeping force of the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS). UNOGBIS also held training workshops for 130 military personnel in Cumere from 20 to 22 November, within the framework of preparations to send an infantry company to Senegal in December to take part in regional peacekeeping exercises. UNOGBIS will also be providing the armed forces with documents for a training-of-trainers programme. The National Commission against the Proliferation of Small Arms and Light Weapons was sworn in by the Government on 3 October.

21. UNOGBIS also trained 50 police officers on code of conduct, use of force and firearms, and ethics from 22 to 26 October. The training was organized in collaboration with the Inspector-General of Police, General Bitchofula Na Fafe. On 7 and 8 November, 30 members of the Judiciary Police were offered training on various aspects of criminal investigation. Many of the officers said they had not undergone any training for several years, highlighting the need for the establishment

of a police academy and for capacity-building. In that regard, UNOGBIS has initiated discussions with the Rule of Law Assistance Unit of the Department of Peacekeeping Operations regarding a possible needs assessment mission to Guinea-Bissau to assess possibilities for capacity-building for the police. UNOGBIS also provided training on community policing to 130 police officers on 22, 27 and 28 November.

22. In September and October, the national Mine Action Coordination Centre, supported by UNDP, continued to focus its demining efforts on areas in and around the capital and the northern border area. In September and October, the national mine action NGO, Lutamos Todos Contra as Minas, in partnership with the international NGO Cleared Ground Demining and the national NGO HUMAID, cleared 128,367 m^2 of landmines and destroyed 1,829 pieces of unexploded ordnance, 8 anti-personnel mines and 14 anti-tank mines.

V. Human rights aspects

23. UNOGBIS organized a seminar from 20 to 22 November on the theme "The challenges faced by Guinea-Bissau's journalists and media". Among the topics discussed were drug trafficking, stability and the 2008 elections. The seminar was attended by 46 journalists, including 15 women. A seminar held from 27 to 29 November focused on the role of community radios.

24. UNOGBIS continued to monitor the situation of the three persons who, in connection with the fighting in March 2006 on the northern border with the Casamance region in Senegal, were sentenced by a military court in April to two to five years of imprisonment for treason and collaboration with the enemy. The military high court overturned an appeal by two of the detainees on 16 October. The three detainees currently remain in detention.

25. UNOGBIS, in partnership with the Institute for Women and Children (Instituto de Mulher e Crança) and with technical support from the United Nations Children's Fund, organized a workshop on the Convention on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women in Gabú on 5 and 6 November. The workshop was attended by 47 participants from local organizations and institutions and by traditional chiefs. Two more workshops will be organized in other parts of the country in December. The aim of the workshops is to raise awareness about the Convention and its Protocol, and to collect inputs to be included in the Guinea-Bissau national report to the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women that is due by March 2008.

VI. Observations and recommendations

26. Despite its limited resource base and capacity, the Government of Guinea-Bissau has made significant strides in tackling the major challenges of fighting against drug trafficking, preparing for legislative elections, pursuing national reconciliation, restoring the credibility of the country externally, and promoting cooperation with international financial institutions. I especially commend the significant progress made by the authorities in promoting the country's emergency fiscal programme. The soon-to-be-signed emergency post-conflict assistance

agreement with IMF attests to the Government's success in its objective to re-establish its credibility with international financial institutions. Continuity is critical if the authorities are to build on these positive developments. Political stability is also needed to pursue national reconciliation and ensure a social environment conducive to peaceful and credible elections next year. The approval by Parliament of the Government's programme constitutes a strong endorsement of the work carried out by Prime Minister Cabi's Government since it came to power in April. I urge all national stakeholders to continue with this positive attitude of consensus-building so that the Government may focus on addressing the major socio-economic needs of Bissau Guineans.

27. Besides being a priority of the Government, the legislative elections in 2008 will be a key benchmark of the state of democracy in Guinea-Bissau. I therefore urge all stakeholders to reach agreement on a date for the elections so that work may begin on resource mobilization. I also appeal to the country's international partners to support this important exercise of democracy.

28. With regard to the urgency of combating drug trafficking in Guinea-Bissau, I am pleased to note that since my last report, in which I called for action and international assistance, and the recommendation for action also made by the Security Council in its presidential statement of 19 October (S/PRST/2007/38), considerable progress has been made by the Government, in close cooperation with its bilateral and multilateral partners, towards developing a robust anti-narcotics trafficking programme. I appeal once again to the partners of Guinea-Bissau to actively and generously support the Lisbon conference as part of the broader strategy towards enabling Guinea-Bissau to mobilize resources to tackle the growing threat of drug trafficking. In this regard, I have instructed my Representative to continue providing support for the Lisbon conference and to facilitate linkages to the ECOWAS-led regional conference to be organized in 2008.

29. Drug trafficking cannot be seen as an isolated challenge, for it flourishes in an environment of institutional weaknesses and widespread poverty. Efforts to tackle drug trafficking will be in vain if social and economic development is neglected and if the welfare of the general population continues to decline, shifting from frustration to desperation. In this setting, I wish to highlight the observation of IMF that Guinea-Bissau will continue to need assistance in the medium term, if it is to achieve its economic and social objectives and ensure basic and minimum living standards for Bissau Guineans. The realization of these objectives is essential for the consolidation of peace and the building of a State based on the rule of law.

30. In my previous report of September 2007, I indicated my intention to submit proposals on how best the United Nations could continue to provide effective assistance for national efforts towards sustainable stabilization in Guinea-Bissau. During consultations held by a Secretariat assessment mission to Guinea-Bissau in August and September 2007, national political actors and international partners stressed that, in light of continuing and emerging challenges in the country, a United Nations political presence remained vital in order to help consolidate stabilization efforts and assist in preventing a reversal of the achievements made. In light of the above, I have recommended to the Security Council that, upon the expiration of the current mandate of UNOGBIS on 31 December 2007, its mandate be extended to 31 December 2008, to allow the Office to continue assisting Guinea-Bissau as it confronts the challenges of peacebuilding. The proposed extension would allow

UNOGBIS to strengthen efforts towards security sector reform, facilitate efforts to combat drug trafficking and organized crime, undertake mediation and good offices functions aimed at promoting dialogue and national reconciliation, and promote respect for the rule of law and for human rights.

31. I should like to conclude by commending the staff of UNOGBIS, under the leadership of my Representative, Shola Omoregie, as well as the personnel of the entire United Nations country team, for the important work they continue to carry out in Guinea-Bissau, often under challenging circumstances.